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ABSTRACT

Matching teaching strategies and classroom environment to students' learning preferences has been found to be related to students' self-concept and achievement. By identifying the learning and reading style of each student, the teacher will increase the youngster's chances of being successful, thus having a positive effect on the child's self-concept and cognitive development. The purpose of this study was to describe a practical approach for identifying learning and reading differences in the elementary classroom which could be replicated in any teaching situation. Sixty-five third grade children were administered a Learning Style Inventory, a Reading Style Inventory, and a Reading Attitude Inventory. This investigation demonstrated children have similarities in their learning preferences, but the extent of individual differences continues to warrant further examination. (Author)

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Abstract

Matching teaching strategies and classroom environment to students' learning preferences has been found to be related to students' self-concept and achievement. By identifying the learning and reading style of each student, the teacher will increase the youngster's chances of being successful-thus having a positive effect on the child's self-concept and cognitive development. The purpose of this study was to describe a practical approach for identifying and learning and reading differences in the elementary classroom which could be replicated in any teaching situation. Sixty-five third grade children were administered a Learning Style Inventory, a Reading Style Inventory, and a Reading Attitude Inventory. This investigation demonstrated children have similarities in their learning preferences but the extent of individual differences continues to warrant further examination.

Investigating Reading Styles, Reading Attitudes,

and Teacher Observations of Third Graders

No common procedure currently exists for identifying learning styles of children or adults. Investigations have emphasized different aspects of an individual's learning style: perceptual dominance (Barbe & Swassing, 1979; Levin, 1974), environment (Dunn & Carbo, 1981); brain hemisperic dominance (Restak, 1979 & Zehauzern, 1982); and cognitive styles (Kagan, 1966; Robinson, 1975; Witkin, 1977).

A common thread to these approaches of identifying learning styles is the concern for the individual and what influences a child's ability to learn. The same concern is expressed by professors of reading and classroom teachers. Practitioners and researchers have an opportunity to collaborate to improve reading instruction.

> "The current interest in learning style focuses on neglected aspect of individual differences. Knowing about learnirg-style differences also suggests to the practitioner the most appropriate instructional approach. The differences among the various learning-style models may be less important than the general effect of describing students in ways that can be stated in terms of matches or person/environment combination." (Hunt, 1981, 647).

Reading professors need to teach their preservice and inservice students about identifying and then accommodating different reading styles of children in the classroom. In addition, since teachers prefer to teach the way they learn (Entwistle, 1981; Barbe, 1979; Cornett, 1983), the learning styles of reading teachers should be identified through specific adult learning style instruments (Entwistle, 1981; Cornett, 1983;

Torrance, 1977). After becoming aware of their own learning styles, teachers are apt to be more accepting and accommodating of student learning style differences.

A teacher who knows his/her own learning style as well as the students' reading style in the classroom will have a systematic and effective procedure for planning instruction (Reiff, 1983). The teacher who selects materials and strategies based on identifying learning/reading styles of children will provide for the diverse reading styles in the classroom. Instruction will enable the student to have options in learning.

This article describes a study which used a practical approach for identifying learning differences in the elementary classroom which could be replicated in any teaching situation. Because learning style investigations tend to focus on individual characteristics, stable patterns may not be apparent, thus, making generalizations difficult.

Sample

Three classes of third graders comprised of 65 children (36 boys, 29 girls) from a rural southern community participated in the study. Forty-one whites and 24 blacks were included. All the participants had permission forms signed by their parents and teachers. The children were administered the Metropolitan Achievement Test; 22 children were at the second grade reading instructional level, 28 were at the third grade reading instructional level, and 15 at the fourth grade. Approximately a third of the classes received free lunches.

Instrumentation

Three instruments were administered to the 65 third grade students. The Learning Style Inventory consists of 104 true/false statements based on traits drawn from fourteen years of school and university research involving more than 20,000 students. The reliability and validity of the instrument as well as individual traits are summarized in the Learning Style Inventory Manual (Dunn & Dunn, 1979).

The elements and stimuli interrelate to present a composite of an individual's learning style according to several trait groups as follows: environmental (light, sound, classroom organization, temperature); emotional (motivation, persistence, responsibility); sociological (peers, self, pair); and physical (perceptual, intake, time, mobility).

The Learning Style Instrument has been used in many studies because it is easy for classroom teachers to administer, provides information on individual students and whole classes, and is accompanied by a manual that suggests how to match instruction with learning style traits (Cavenaugh, 1981).

Sample Learning Style Inventory Questions

1. The things I remember best are the things I read.
2. When I really have a lot of studying to do I like to work alone.
3. I like to learn most by building, baking, or doing things.
4. I think best just before lunch.

The Reading Style Inventory was a pilot instrument developed by Marie Carbo in 1980 and it is now a standardized Reading Inventory (Carbo, 1982). The pilot inventory consisted of 15

multiple choice questions which include the same traits as the Learning Style Inventory. Answers are neither right or wrong because the participants choose the response which best describes their preference for reading. Administration of the Reading Style Inventory takes approximately 20 minutes.

Sample Reading Style Inventory Questions

1. I read because
   a. It makes my parents and teachers happy.
   b. My friends read a lot.
   c. I enjoy reading.
2. I prefer to read
   a. alone
   b. with a small group of friends
   c. with my teacher
   d. alone, with my friends, or with my teacher

On the Reading Attitude Inventory the participants responded either "agreed", "disagreed", or "undecided" to each of the 24 questions (Lewis, 1979). It takes approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Sample Reading Attitude Inventory Questions

1. You would rather watch t.v. than read.
2. You would rather look at the pictures in a book than read a book.
3. You like for the room to be quiet so you can read on your free time.

The Learning Style Preference Checklist was completed for each child by a third grade teacher who taught all the respondents in reading. This instrument focused on the same traits as the

Learning Style Inventory and Reading Style Inventory. Before reviewing the responses the teacher checked the traits she thought was preferred by each child.

Administration Procedure

The same teacher orally administered to each third grade class the three aforementioned instruments: Learning Style Inventory, Reading Style Inventory, and the Reading Attitude Inventory. The Learning Style Inventory was administered during one session and the other two inventories at another session.

Results

The means and standard deviations for responses on the Learning Style Inventory are reported in Table 1. Because the standard deviations indicated a wide range in scores or preferences, caution should be exercised in these results. To provide the most meaningful information, the Learning Style Inventory of each child should be analyzed by the teacher to determine individual preferences.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

Table 2 summarizes the students' responses for dominant preferences on the Reading Style Inventory. The Chi Square analysis showed a significant difference between girls and boys as to who they preferred to learn with for the sociological trait. More boys preferred learning with teachers or other adults (15%) than girls (1%), the latter preferred learning with peers. Both groups preferred to learn alone (43%) or with anyone (27%). Preference for learning by touch was related to sex (35%) and race (35%). The visual mode alone was least related to both sex and race (18%).

Also included in Table 2 are the teacher's responses which differ from the students' responses in several instances. The teacher did not anticipate that the children would prefer learning without sound or by themselves rather than with peers. Morning was thought to be the more preferred time to learn by the teacher but the youngsters chose that time less. The students viewed themselves as more self-motivated, persistent, and responsible than did the teacher. The teacher thought the children preferred to learn to read by visual and auditory modes, but the students chose the kinesthetic approach.

(Insert Table 2 about here)

The Reading Attitude Inventory indicated that students held a generally favorable attitude toward reading; however, playtime (56%) and television (63%) were preferred above reading. Again, few differences existed between the groups of children involved in the study. The majority of children reported that they felt happy when reading (73%). About half indicated they would rather look at pictures in a book than read it and about the same number of students preferred to answer the questions at the end of a chapter without reading a text.

Consistent with results of the Reading Style Inventory, overwhelmingly, children (89%) preferred a quiet room for reading. Students indicated a preference for going to the library (71%) but reported that they often started a book without finishing it (55%) and 41% seemed to believe they selected books which were not interesting. Reading at school was regarded as work by 36% but 62% enjoyed reading at home.

Implications

Matching teaching strategies and classroom environment to students' learning preferences has been found to be related to students' self concept and achievement (Dunn & Carbo, 1981; Krimsky, 1982; Pizzo, 1982). Thus, an analysis of student's learning styles and attitudes is a practical tool for improving classroom accomplishments. By identifying the reading style of each student, the teacher will increase the youngster's chances of being successful - thus, having a positive effect on the child's self-concept and cognitive development.

This investigation demonstrated that children have similarities in their preferences for learning but the extent of individual differences continues to warrant further examination.

TABLE 1

LEARNING STYLE INVENTORY

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
Sound	26.25*	25.51
Light	39.10*	21.99
Warmth	50.48**	9.66
Formal Design	40.59**	20.73
Motivated	53.29**	6.78
Adult Motivation	51.48**	6.30
Teacher	55.62**	4.93
Persistence	50.32**	11.89
Responsible	46.35**	13.03
Structure	56.95**	6.32
Alone	50.84**	8.29
Peer Learner	43.46**	21.60
Learning with Adults	41.59**	29.49
Several Ways	50.54**	12.49
Auditory	50.49**	10.69
Visual	56.35**	11.67
Tactile	53.38**	7.12
Kinesthetic	53.51**	7.29
Requires Intake	32.94**	23.30
Morning	43.63**	25.45
Late Morning	43.48**	29.54
Afternoon	53.16**	12.55
Evening	49.76**	14.96
Mobility	45.71**	18.91

* 20-40 Students do not prefer to learn this way or do not possess this variable

** 40-60 Students have no preference for learning this way

60-80 Students prefer learning this way

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